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Colonial Virginia:

A POEM

DELIVERED BY

HON. R. T. W. DUKE, Jr.

OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.

Deputy Governor-General of the Society of Colonial Wars in
the State of Virginia,

At the Meeting of the Society of
Colonial Dames of Virginia,

IN RICHMOND, VA., APRIL 18th, 1899.

COLONIAL VIRGINIA.

What voices do I hear ?
What ghosts of old-time memories surge
From the dim past, as we upon the verge
Of a new century's dawning, stop and peer
With eager eyes through all the fog and mist
Time like a curtain hangs about dead days ?

I see an inlet kissed
By soft sea breezes and o'er hung with haze,
Such as our Indian Summers vet for Autumn keep
In all this Southland ; and as if asleep,
A vessel anchored there — the very first
That ever in these quiet waters burst.

And then the hum and stir
Of busy men in fields and forests new,
Building their homes ; and passing in review,
Smith and his men — few braver I ever,
Have since these same dark woodlands trod
And yet Virginia has not lacked for strong brave men.

A temple built to God
By pious hands next rises o'er the plain,
Whose stately tower in some sort seems to be
Nearer than memory merely ; for I see,
If I dream not, old Jamestown's crumbling wall
By woman's hands protected from its fall.

And yet what noise is this ?
A ghost of sound that floats down through the years,
Thrilling the soul with echoes of old fears,
And ugly discords, frightful as the hiss
Of serpents in the dark ; the Indian's yell,
Murder and fire, deep groans and silence then ;

No fiends of deepest hell
Such vengeance ever wreaked on sinful men,
As on that fatal morning in the Spring,
With treachery dark, the murderous Indian King
Did upon those who near this self-same spot
Had made their homes and cast their humble lot.

And yet brave souls, as when
Ever there has been in our mother's need,
Were then, and heroes worthy of the need
That heroes merit — 'membrance of brave men,
Risked life and all, stemming the swollen stream,
And snatching victory from o'erwhelming night.

Then like a troublous dream,
Vexing the soul with visions that affright,
I see a torch from Bacon's hands alight
His own house first, then beam fast following beam
Light freedom's lamp, that henceforth through all days.
Virginia's sons have trimmed and kept ablaze.

And then dull sound of bell,
And muffled drum, and lo! a gust of tears,
Blinds for a moment all the flight of years!
We know the sound, it is a funeral knell.
For our first martyr in the cause of right,
Hansford, whose memory will forever shine!

For such souls should no night
Ever their glories dim; a statelier line
His praise has sung! yet these poor words of mine
At thought of him would kindle into light!
He was a "rebel"! Let us not forget
What glories gild the word, resplendent yet.

Then days of quiet peace,
Upbuilding of the State, and that brave ride
Of Spottswood's men across the mountain side,
Into our glorious valley, from the seas;
The Golden Horseshoe Knights. In later years
A nobler knighthood that same valley knew.

And now one form appears,
Resplendent as the sun in ether blue,
When clouds have vanished, truest of the true
E'en though a youth, his martial visage wears
The promise of the time now soon to be
When Fate shall hail him Father of the Free.

With him a noble son
Of that old County where my earliest breath
Was drawn. "Brave Fry, doomed to untimely death"
"Good, just and noble," thus wrote Washington
Above his grave; what grander epitaph
By grander hands inscribed could man desire.

He only who can quaff
Pierian waters; or lip-touched with fire
From Heaven's own altar, should attempt to sing
Those brave old days, when "Country, God and King
And death to France" rang out unto the sky,
That France so soon our friend; that King our enemy.

I may not take the time,
To trace th' alternate current of success
And bitter failure: In the storm and stress
Of these late days, small room is left for rhyme.
In greater books 'tis writ: you well recall,
The moulding of our greatest warrior then.

Yet do I find through all,
Whether by History writ or poet's pen,
Our sires so bravely bore themselves, that we
Unworthy as we are, may dauntlessly
Look all the world in face and bid it say
In war, in peace, what greater men than they.

Nor need we fear today,
Whenever for a Man loud calls the hour ;
She who has never failed, will fail not then—
Still courses true in every throbbing vein
The same strong blood that made thy sons thy dower—
Oh ! Virgin Mother of transcendent men.

Virginia—Peerless—Queen—
Our Old Dominion ; We who are here tonight,
Her former glories fitly celebrate—
Pray God that we may ever keep her great,
And to her use our hands, our hearts, our might,
Oh ! let us pledge anew and consecrate.

